



## THE LESSON

By Dana Rebmann  
Photography by Nicolas Schopfer

“Everyone at Initium will be able to create their own watch,” says instructor Ivan De Matteis, a master watchmaker who worked for years at Rolex and Patek Philippe. “Some will obviously need more help than others.”



“I struggled a little keeping a steady hand with some of the smallest parts,” says student Mike Toomey, of Boulder, Colorado. “Our instructor, Oliver Mory, practically tossed flea-size screws into the plates and bridges, handling a pair of tweezers like we would a dinner fork.”

As vexing as it can be to put together the inner workings—the tiniest parts can require the use of a jeweler’s loupe—the most challenging aspect may be determining the one-of-a-kind look. Participants can choose from 240 bands, while hands come in a mind-boggling number of shapes and colors—and that’s all before you consider the decorative movements, cases, and dials. “We have to say ‘stop’ sometimes,” says Geneva workshop manager Jean-Christophe Benz.

As with most horological pursuits, the workshops aren’t cheap: A half-day course costs around \$1,700. Consider, however, that a starter Rolex would likely set you back about \$5,000, and there’s little doubt that these classes are worth your time.

# Making Time

Build your own watch at one of Initium’s Swiss workshops

In a 17th-century building on a quiet street in Geneva’s Old Town, people sit hunched over benches, armed with screwdrivers and tweezers, quietly dismantling and reassembling watches. While this may be happening in the luxury watchmaking capital of the world, these aren’t skilled craftsmen; they’re amateur horophiles who have chosen to spend their vacation days working in monk-like concentration to create their own bespoke Swiss watches.

In 2015, three timepiece-loving Swiss business students founded Initium for just these kinds of tourists. They now run three workshops—in the village of Le Noirmont, here in Geneva, and in the German-speaking town of Gebertingen—where pupils enroll in half- or full-day classes to assemble automatic or hand-wound mechanical pieces, working with master watchmakers to ensure that everything comes together with that famous Swiss precision.



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